

A. DONALD McEACHIN

4TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

WASHINGTON OFFICE
314 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-6365

RICHMOND DISTRICT OFFICE
110 N. ROBINSON ST. SUITE 403
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23220
(804) 486-1840

SUFFOLK DISTRICT OFFICE
131 N. SATATOGA STREET, SUITE B
SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA 23434
(757) 942-6050



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4604

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

ENERGY

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

January 7th, 2022

The Honorable Richard L. Saslaw
Majority Leader
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 1856
Springfield, VA 22151-0856

The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr.
Minority Leader
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 6205
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Dear Majority Leader Saslaw and Minority Leader Norment,

I write today regarding Governor-elect Youngkin's announcement that he intends to nominate Andrew Wheeler as Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources.

Over the past eight years, our Commonwealth, through the hard work of our elected officials, has made significant progress in implementing policies to combat the climate crisis and limit the impacts of climate change. In this time, we have seen passage of the landmark Virginia Clean Economy Act to transition our energy sector to 100% clean energy by 2050; the reestablishment of the Virginia Climate Commission; the establishment of the Solar Energy Development Authority Board; a commitment to reducing vehicle emissions by strengthening emissions standards and to building out our electric vehicle infrastructure; passage of the Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Act, and more.

I am proud to have helped in these efforts to make our Commonwealth more proactive in addressing climate change and mitigating its impacts during my time in the General Assembly. However, serving in Washington I have seen firsthand the harm that can come from entrusting Andrew Wheeler with the health and safety of the environment and our most vulnerable and with the critical need to confront the climate crisis with the seriousness it requires.

A former lobbyist for coal giant Murray Energy, during his time serving under President Donald Trump as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Mr. Wheeler took numerous counterproductive actions that harmed our environment and hindered our ability to take action on the climate crisis. At the EPA, Mr. Wheeler sought to minimize the impacts of pollution in the rulemaking process, undo the Clean Power Plan to limit carbon pollution from our energy generation sector, weaken federal vehicle fuel standards, restrict the use of science in the rulemaking process and in protecting

public health, and hinder the restoration of Chesapeake Bay by weakening Clean Water Act protections and proposing funding cuts to EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program of 90 percent.

You do not have to take it from me. In 2019, former Republican EPA Administrators William Reilly, Lee Thomas and Christine Whitman warned that recent gains in cleaner air and water in the U.S. were beginning to backslide. Ms. Whitman indicated that Mr. Wheeler and the Trump administration were "using ideology to drive environmental policy instead of letting science drive policy." Concerns were also raised about Mr. Wheeler's close ties to industry and the tendency of the Trump administration's EPA and Mr. Wheeler to follow industry's interests.

I recognize that it is rare for the Senate of Virginia to not give approval to a gubernatorial nominee, but this would not be the first time a nomination has not moved forward.

In 2016, Governor Terry McAuliffe appointed Judge Jane Roush to the Virginia Supreme Court following consultation with House of Delegates Courts of Justice Committee Chairman Dave Albo. Judge Roush failed to be granted a full 12-year term following two recess appointments simply because the Republican-led General Assembly was eager to assert authority over judicial appointments. In 2014, Republicans in the General Assembly voted down Governor McAuliffe's nomination of Boyd Marcus for a spot on the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. And in 2006, Republicans rejected Governor Tim Kaine's nomination of Daniel LeBlanc, former head of the Virginia AFL-CIO, as secretary of the commonwealth.

I believe that there is more legitimate reason to reject Mr. Wheeler's nomination than there was with any of those listed above.

At best, Mr. Wheeler is an imprudent environmental and climate leader. He has shown callous disregard for climate protections and environmental justice priorities and, should he become Governor-elect Youngkin's Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, would threaten the progress our Commonwealth has made in these areas.

I urge you to oppose Mr. Wheeler's nomination by Governor-elect Youngkin to serve as Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources.

Sincerely,



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

CC:

Senator George L. Barker
Senator John J. Bell
Senator Jennifer B. Boysko
Senator Amanda F. Chase
Senator John A. Cosgrove, Jr.
Senator R. Creigh Deeds
Senator Bill DeSteph
Senator Siobhan S. Dunnavant
Senator Adam P. Ebbin
Senator John S. Edwards
Senator Barbara A. Favola
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Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.
Senator Ghazala F. Hashmi
Senator Janet D. Howell
Senator Jen A. Kiggans
Senator Lynwood W. Lewis, Jr.
Senator Mamie E. Locke
Senator L. Louise Lucas
Senator David W. Marsden
Senator T. Montgomery "Monty" Mason
Senator Jennifer L. McClellan
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Senator Lionell Spruill, Sr.
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Senator Scott A. Surovell
Senator Jill Holtzman Vogel